

Lives and Times

March 2007

Quarterly **NEWSLETTER** of the
Caswell County Historical Association, Incorporated
P.O. Box 278, Yanceyville, N.C. 27379

VOLUME XXX, Number One
Sallie P. Anderson and
Lauren Chesnut Eakin, Editors

Historical and Genealogical Visitors from Rockingham County

On Friday, Feb. 9, the Museum was visited by Robert W. Carter, spark-plug of the Rockingham Historical, and a Mr. Chance in pursuit of information we might have on the latter's family. We offered them the Kendall Abstracts for starters, and I believe eventually we treed one of his forebears. It seemed that the late Burch Blaylock had mentioned this family as being in South Caswell. If by **CHANCE** anybody reading this article knows anything about the family, get in touch with Bob Carter (Jr.) at 1141 Irvin Farm Road, Reidsville, N.C. 27320.

Bob and my late husband Zeke Anderson were in the Dan River Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, and Bob remembered when the chapter visited Berry Hill, home of the **HAIRSTON** family up the river from Danville a very few miles. There is another family home named Berry Hill in Halifax County at South Boston, Va. but there is no known connection.

Zeke and I had been particularly interested in Danville's Berry Hill because, according to proof found in the Danville Library, Zeke's William Harrison, his g.g.grandfather's brother, was buried on the northern boundary of Peter Hairston's plantation. We looked for any sign of a marker but found none. After all, though Williams was named as one of the founders of Danville, he died in the early 1800s with will in Pittsylvania County and left descendants there. We didn't find any tombstone for Major Thomas Harrison, who left will in 1798 either, and we know where he died on the Dan River in Caswell County.

At Berry Hill, we found a very old frame house, several stories, with a descendant still living there though not at home when we were allowed to visit. We were told that below the house, where what was called "The Quarters" had been, there had once lived 1,000 slaves. The remarkable fact was stated at the house, and Bob had brought a newspaper article substantiating this and much, much more.

The *Winston-Salem Journal* gave a full account of the death of Judge Peter W. Hairston on Sunday, Feb. 4, 2007, at his ancestral home, Cooleemee Plantation, on the Yadkin River. A full account of his life and descendants was given, and the material will be filed in the Museum.

In the beginning of the write-up, I found out that 1,000 slaves really could have been at Danville at that Hairston Plantation because, and we quote: "His ancestors were Irish immigrants who built tobacco plantations across North Carolina, Virginia and Mississippi." The plantations were worked by slaves, many of whom took the Hairston name when they were freed in 1863. As many as 10,000 slaves worked on 45 plantations. Henry Weincek documented the history of the Hairston family and its slaves in a book published in 1999 titled *The Hairstons, An American Family in Black and White*.

Member and former president of the CCHA Lib McPherson says she has the book and will share it with others. References to this book have appeared in the *Danville Register* along with accounts of the bill in the Legislature authorizing an apology for Virginia's role in slavery. Sound documentation has made this a worthwhile reference. Judge Hairston recognized his biracial cousins and supported the Hairston clan, which meets annually and has members from all over the U.S.A.

Any attempts to find parallels between the Hairston book and Alex Haley's *Roots* will need far more documentation than was at the disposal of the author at the time of writing. The white Thomas Lea of the book is no way related to the actual Thomas Lea, proven by many Lea descendants to have lived in the place described in *Roots*. Some persons were misled to the extent that they set fire to the house where they thought Kizzie was a slave. Sometimes scandal travels so much faster than truth and leaves a reputation irreparably damaged!

Womack Family in Both Counties

WOMACK descendants will be delighted to learn that reliable information on their ancestor Abraham has been contributed to us for our use by Mr. Carter also. A tree taking his ancestry back to England finds the first forbear in Caswell County dying in Caswell County in 1800 and leaving Josiah dying here in 1848. Josiah's son Abraham, born in Caswell, dies in Rockingham. There is much more on a separate five-page fold-out.

There have been several Womack genealogies filed in the library here. At least one recent listing was completed in Pittsylvania County, a lifetime effort. We had an inquiry on the **WILLIAMS** family and had the honor of introducing someone to the fine Williams book in the Museum. There was also interest in Joseph Williams and Sarah Lanier Williams, whose fragmented tombstone of 1812 was found some years ago on Jones property here.

Sometimes you get information submitted or desired and can't tell a thing about it that will help out with someone's family tree. That's the point about **NORMAN** information submitted (to the Rockingham people - no return address).

We did have some Normans named in the Heritage, but none seemed to fit this information, which included a map of the Albemarle Sound off the coast of North Carolina and three pages in all. There is a page with four Normans on it, and the map has a burial ground very near the beach with names: Hardy Norman, Hardy H. Norman, Penelope Norman and Keziah Norman. The other page is filled with an extensive family tree - all Normans but no dates that helped us connect the name with the preacher everybody in old South Caswell remembered on account of a sermon he delivered. I thought Mr. Plumbee might have put the story in our History, but he definitely knew about that famous sermon, because he told the story and I heard it. It was a very dry season. People looked up at a cloudless sky and back down at their wilting crops and decided to ask the preacher to call a special meeting to pray for rain. What church? I don't remember, but I know that that preacher's name was Mr. or the Reverend Norman. The sermon was filled with scriptural references to droughts in the Bible (of which there are many), and in case this was due to the wrath of the Almighty, as it was sometimes in the Bible, the preacher begged the Lord to forgive his people of whatever they had or had not done that was wrong. He would beseech pardon on the part of every man, woman and child in the community, even those who were not there, so that rain might come to relieve their suffering. He did not stop until his own throat got so dry he couldn't speak and that was because (you guessed it) there wasn't any water available! The meeting dispersed in silence as sorrowful people returned to their wagons and headed home. It was told that even before some of them had time to get home and put up the animals in the barns there came a great rainstorm. To make a long story short, it rained buckets, it rained barrels, it rained creeks and river and never before had they seen such a rain!!! That's why from then on every time the community was blessed with unusual rainfall one would say to another, "I'll tell you that was a Norman's soaker!"

Any interested Norman may write us for the above information.

And in other news....

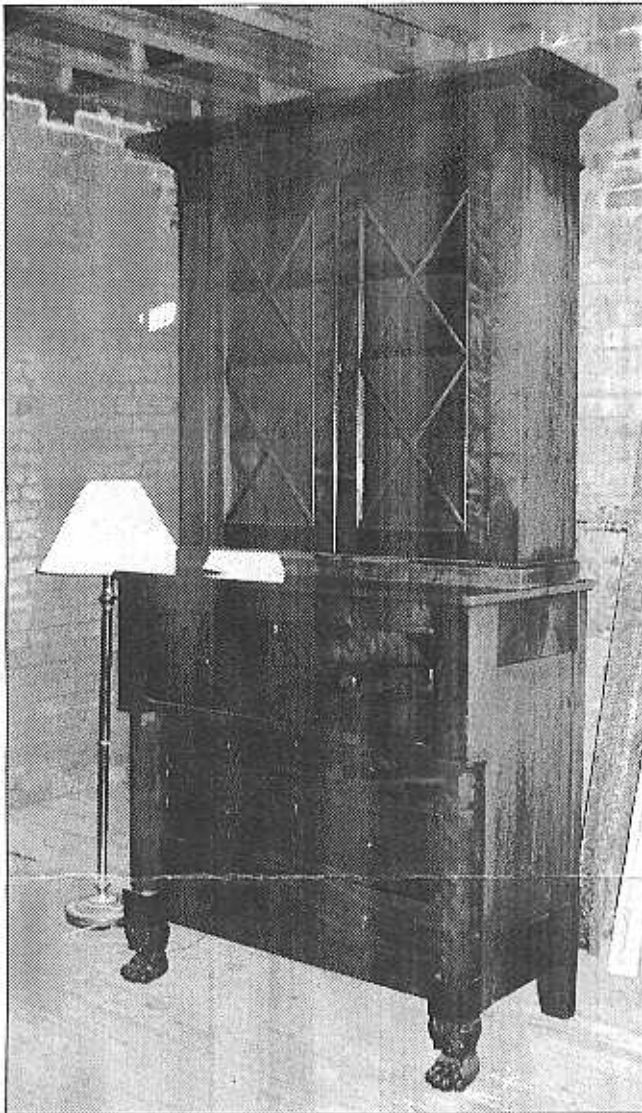
Milton's efforts of more than a decade are beginning to show results. They had an opening of the formerly closed section of Thomas Day's home-workshop building on Sunday, February 18. The downstairs main room had been re-framed and re-floored with fresh new walls where charred timbers formerly reigned.

"Now, we're not through, you understand," they'll tell you, "but we finally feel that we are getting somewhere with our project." The ample refreshments were on a large table to the right of the entrance with more waiting in an unfinished adjoining space, and dozens of people milled about admiring this or that feature about the largest room in the Tavern and showing what things looked like after the disastrous fire that could have destroyed one of Milton's most cherished historic structures. Since the Organized Restoration began, items for the permanent displays have come in. On view were several Thomas Day chairs, and two large pieces of furniture from the Maud Gatewood estate were featured.

One of these was a ladies' dresser or bureau, which had everything – nice, large mirror, nice, large drawers and, would you believe, large side-cabinets for milady's hats and perhaps starched petticoats (we didn't open this feature – you weren't supposed to touch anything).

They had the late Mary Satterfield's Thomas Day cradle, which I had seen at Mary's house when she always said she was leaving it for the Restoration whenever they needed it. We noted that it was exactly like the two Thomas Day cradles left to the Richmond-Miles Museum in Yanceyville by the Kerr girls, Katharine, now deceased (and how we miss her!) and Mary Frances. So far as I could tell, the three cradles are exactly alike.





The other Gatewood acquisition bothers me. It is a butler's desk. It's mahogany and is a most formidable piece of furniture to move, put together and reach when you get the top on. It comes in two pieces, a chest of drawers about four-and-a-half feet, with a removable set of shelves another four-and-a-half feet at least in height. Any piece of furniture over eight feet tall is a real problem in most houses today. The top is, in effect, a china closet, but it would take a might tall butler to reach the top shelf and be careful of those glass-paned doors.

They will have two of them if we locate the one Mae Mebane Donoho donated some years ago. It was also mahogany and the glass-panes numbered thirteen in each twin. Also, it had a double eagle on the top for decoration and was made in Virginia before 1820.

Our congratulations to all concerned.

-- Sallie P. Anderson

The Ever-Broadening World of Thomas Day

-- Lib McPherson

The Thomas Day House-Union Tavern Restoration, Inc. celebrated another milestone in the restoration of Day's home and workshop on February 18, when a large number of Friends gathered to see the interior of the

tavern so beautiful restored. Guests wandered through the lower rooms admiring the craftsmanship of the woodwork, the Day furniture owned by the organization, and shared the satisfaction of the leadership as they see some light at the end of the tunnel of this tremendous project. They are to be commended for their diligence and persistence over the years.

As the Milton transformation has proceeded, research has continued to weave a broader and broader picture of Thomas Day's world and his connections with movers and shakers of the early to mid-1800s. The Thomas Day Education Project documentary moves toward fruition. Former Washington Post writer Patsy Rogers has continued her interest in the Day family connections across the South and North and is assisting Laurel Sneed with some of the research to "tie together" the Day family genealogy and other connections that reveal their network. In the mid-90s, Lib McPherson discovered the marriage record of Day's daughter, Mary Ann, and a Presbyterian minister, Rev. James Chresfield, in the Caswell County Register of Deeds Office. Their work in Lexington, N.C. and at Barber-Scotia College was later documented, but nothing was known about Chresfield and how he came to be in Caswell County. Patsy Rogers' research has unearthed much information, including Chresfield's home community, Oxford, Pennsylvania, his theology training in an Institute in Oxford which

trained missionaries for service in Liberia (now Lincoln University).

Another exciting clue is a letter from a Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, N.C. to the Milton Presbyterian Church requesting transfer of Aquilla Day's membership from Milton to the church in Wilmington. Chresfield had a distinguished career of his own as pastor of several churches in NC. These tidbits are clues that bring more questions: For example, is there a connection between John Day's study of theology in Milton with the headmaster of the Milton Female Academy, the institute where Chresfield studied, John Day's service as a missionary in Liberia beginning c. 1830, and Chresfield's connections to Milton and the Day family?



Without a doubt the Day saga continues to grow in its significance in the history of Milton, Caswell County, North Carolina, and our nation. The restoration of the Milton home and workshop and the continuing revelation of Day's connections with leaders across our nation yields a mind-boggling vision of what all of this together may come to mean to our community and the world of historic preservation.

Slave Records Being Preserved

A member of the Caswell County Historical Association is volunteering her time to help preserve the genealogical history of 19th century Caswell County slaves.

Last fall, Karen Avants began photographing and archiving business records of Caswell County resident Dr. George Robertson. Robertson owned a tobacco warehouse and prizery here in the 1840s and bought and sold slaves as well, Avants said.

Many Caswell businessmen did so on a small basis, she explained. And because Caswell, Granville, Rockingham, Person and Warren counties were so wealthy during that time, they had large slave populations whose legacy

it is vital to preserve, she said.

"This information is so important to people. The genealogy researched is priceless. For many, it's their only link to their families before 1870."

"What's out there needs to be available and searchable," Avants said. Robertson's records were bought by a private collector at an auction in Mebane last fall.

In January, Congress enacted the Preservation of Records of Servitude, Emancipation and Post-Civil War Reconstruction Act, which seeks to preserve, digitize and catalogue the genealogical records of families of former slaves. Bills of sales of slaves were included in Robertson's ledgers, and they offer valu-

-able information on who local African-Americans were, where they had come from and whether they stayed in this area or were sent elsewhere.

Avants' research is not yet ready for public inspection but will be soon, she said.

"The CCHA welcomes any and all opportunities to collect and archive historical documentation," said CCHA President Karen Oestreicher. "We want to preserve Caswell County's rich history. By collecting these documents we can help to promote tourism in Caswell County. People will come to search our records for their family histories. We want to keep our historic records here in Caswell County and to have those records available for the people. If anyone has a collection that they would like to keep in the county they can donate it to the historical association and know that it will be preserved for future generations."

"We did not become involved because of the Preservation of Records Act," Oestreicher added. "We became involved because we care about and want to preserve our historical documentations. The CCHA has some slave information and I am in the process of archiving all our genealogical material. Caswell County has some passionate history buffs out there, and I hope that they will continue to support the Caswell County Historical Association. It is with the help of all these great volunteers that we are able to preserve our past and to promote our future."



CCHA annual dues of \$20 for individuals and \$30 for family memberships are payable by January of each year for the calendar year. To renew your membership, please complete this form and mail to the **Caswell County Historical Association**, Attn: Treasurer Mary Jo Henderson, Box 278, Yanceyville, NC 27379 with your check or money order.

All members receive the Association newsletter 4 times a year with information about Caswell County families, news of historic preservation in the county and information about Historical Association events. Volunteers are needed in the museum, on committees and other projects. Tell us how you will help.

Membership for 2007 New Renewal (circle one)

Name _____ Home Phone _____

Address _____ Work Phone: _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____ Fax _____

Payment: _____ Email _____

Here are my dues for 2007 \$ _____ I would like to be a volunteer. I would like to

Here's a gift for the Association \$ _____ help with: _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

Winter Membership Meeting to Feature "Crossing of the Dan"

CCHA Members and guests will be treated to an exciting preview of the "Crossing of the Dan" permanent exhibit that will enhance the Dan River Region efforts to capitalize on this watershed event in the Revolutionary War on Sunday, March 11, at 2:30 pm in the Bason Fellowship Hall of Yanceyville Presbyterian Church.

Douglas Powell of South Boston, Chairman of the Crossing of the Dan Exhibit Committee, and committee member Larry Aaron will present a slide show detailing this event and showing how the exhibit, which will be located in a historic South Boston property, connects to areas such as Caswell County. Graphics illustrating the exhibit will be on display. Program presenters will explain the scope of the exhibit.

The exhibit is a permanent museum quality exhibit complete with maps, models, etc. along with large panels and original painting of the Crossing by a North Carolina artist from Alamance County.

Included in the presentation on March 11 will be slides of the 225th anniversary of Greene's Crossing of the Dan on February 14, 1781 and other activities that have accompanied this celebration.

CCHA President Karen Oestreicher and other members of the Board of Directors will give updates on business and program matters of our association. The Board is dealing with some critical issues and is in the process of setting goals for the immediate future as well as long range goals. Don't miss this opportunity to be involved in charting our future.

An Opportunity, An Appeal

The Caswell County Board of Commissioners has authorized a Master Plan for Trails.

The Caswell County Historical Association has the opportunity to make a contribution to this historic effort.

Many of the members of the Association have old roads on their property or know of others that do. Some of us are members of churches or other organizations that have control of lands with such old thoroughfares, many of which are still legally public or connect places of historic importance or natural beauty.

The Historical Association could create an inventory of such roads, trails and thoroughfares to be consulted creating the Master Plan for Trails.

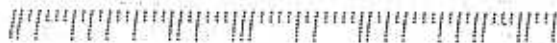
Anyone with knowledge of such old roads or interested in helping to compile such an inventory is invited to communicate with the Trail Steering Committee of the Caswell County Recreation Commission.

Please call Susan Merritt by phone at (336) 421-4054, by email at cyclestore@aol.com, or by letter at P.O. Box 840, Yanceyville, NC 27379. You can also stop in at the North Road Bicycle Co. on the Court Square in Yanceyville.

I would enjoy meeting and talking with you!

Sincerely,

Susan Merritt



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Caswell County Historical Association
P.O. Box 278
Yanceyville, NC 27379
www.rootsweb.com/~ncccha/



RED DOTS indicate
2007 DUES are due